

Schenker`s perspective on Sonata Form: First Movement of Mozart`s Sonata for Piano and Violin KV 304

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Abstract: *Schenker analysis, considered as one of the most complex musical analyses, but also one of the most rational, is the one who leads to developing one's ability to understand a musical work in an absolute sense, from both the performer's and the listener's perspective. Schenker brings a new vision on musical form by considering harmonics as being decisive in determining its distinct sections. The essence of Schenker's concept resides in putting the notion of sonata form (as a general construction) next to the concept of structural levels. The perspective it offers on the whole is based precisely on this reduction of structural levels, giving signification to all composing and performing elements, at the same time.*

Keywords: *music, sonatas, Schenker, Mozart, analysis.*

1. Schenker analysis and its importance in the Approach

In the context of numerous musical analyses discovered and applied over time, Schenker's analysis turned out not as a final of music, but as a point from where to continue its evolution, the path to a vaster and more encompassing understanding of its meanings.

Schenker makes a fusion between harmonics and counterpoint, extracts the essential, renouncing the elements of secondary importance. This *reduction* proposes three distinct structural levels: *foreground* (first level, the score), *middleground* (second level of the score), and *background* (fundamental level, formed by the chords of steps I and V).

Researching, understanding and applying this type of analysis develops first of all one's ability to hear and understand a musical work in an absolute sense. The difference between excellent and mediocre performing thus becomes clear.

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“...aspects of the relation between analysis and performance [...] draw great attention in the Schenker community, as the discussion on the pedagogy of Schenker’s interpretation is justified” (Cook 2013, 34).

1.1. The Sonata form from Schenker’s perspective

The sonata form is the most important construction of tonal music.

The prototype of the sonata form in the works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven can be found in the sonatas of Carl Ph. E. Bach.

Schenker adopted the sonata form as having three parts: *Exposition – Development – Reprise*, and the three sections are regarded as distinct parts, and so, analysed as such. He considers harmonics to be decisive when determining sections.

From Schenker’s perspective, the Exposition is regarded in terms of a decomposing process into linear progressions and structural movements of the bass.

As to the Development, Schenker considers this section „allows for no generalisation regarding her harmonics content, namely `varied tonalities’” (Forte and Gilbert 1982, 277).

The Reprise is, however, run through (controlled) by a single broad harmony, that of the tonic, while the Coda/Codetta is developing in her nature, moving within the “different tonalities”, but always finishing on the Tonic.

Strictly referring to the sphere of sonatas for piano and violin composed by Mozart, Einstein makes perhaps the most beautiful description of the unique sonata in a minor tonality, the Sonata for piano and violin KV 304: “springs from the depths of emotion and goes beyond the style of alternate dialogue, to knock at the doors of the wonderful world of drama, which Beethoven was about to open widely” (Einstein 1945, 255).

Einstein “omits to mention that Mozart brilliantly manoeuvres understanding and perception regarding the texture of accompaniment, which gives birth to subtle changes in expression at the level of the phrase, preferring to regard this opus as an immediate cry of passion, sent out by the tormented artist” (Breene 2007).

1.2. Movement I from the Sonata for Piano and Violin KV 304

Movement 1 prepares the performer to hold a discourse in a serious and earnest character through the indication *Allegro* associated with the minor mode and *alla-breve* tempo.

The start is represented by an introduction which brings tonal tension, created by the arpeggiated motion toward the dominant, motion that determines an increase in musical intensity.



Fig. 1. *Sonata for piano and violin K.304, Introduction (ms.1-12)*

The Introduction (bars 1-12) starts with a unison texture, not only in the two piano registers, but also in the violin's composition, reminding of beginning passages in *tutti*, typical of many classical symphonies (e.g. *Haffner* by Mozart).

The orchestral quality of this introduction is also reflected in the contrasts between registers (initially, all the three lines in unison are from different registers, and then, in the second phrase (bars 8-12), the right-hand lines stay in unison with the violin line, while the left hand maintains the registral contrast).

This unisono expresses a state of inner dramatism, which requires in its performing to support the moral tension, created by the arpeggiated motion toward step V. Within this motion, the performers lead together toward the graduate increase of the musical intensity; the second phrase (bars 9-12) brings a hammered, but at the same time dynamic rhythm (in the same unisono), and the performance leads from inner turmoil to exteriorising the dramatic tension.

Tonally, the second phrase prepares the apparition of the main theme group (through the succession I-IV).

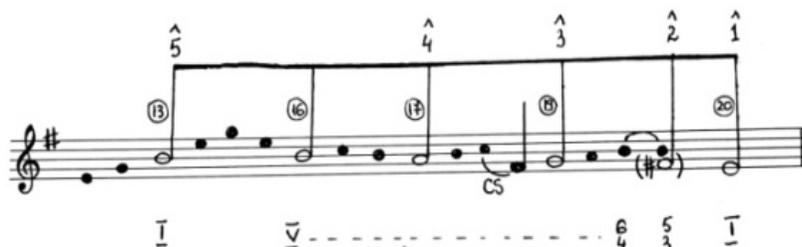


Fig. 2. *Sonata for piano and violin K.304, First Theme (ms.13-20)*

First theme unfolds for two phrases with 4 bars each (bars 13-20) and is brought in by the violin, and the piano offers the harmonic support.

Following the musical drawing created in the introduction, the arpeggiated ascent of the violin (toward the fundamental sound $\hat{5}$ of the primary line), this time with accompaniment from the piano, frees itself from the sensation of rigidity of the start and creates a new opening toward expressivity and a certain freedom in the tempo, coming from flowing through the sounds of the tonic triad. The performers collaborate here to outline the phrase, which lays down in the frame of the 8 bars on the most powerful harmonics relation I-V-I.

The return to the fundamental $\hat{1}$ corresponds with releasing the musical tension. Using the vibrato and a stronger bow pull on the second fundamental sound $\hat{5}$ (the dotted half note b, bar 16) creates an effect of outstanding expressiveness, but also a qualitative sound, needed to sustain the fundamental sound, from which the tension release then starts, by descending the primary line $\hat{5} \hat{4} \hat{3} \hat{2} \hat{1}$.

The transitional passage that continues after the main theme group is characterised through a melodic pattern which reminds of bourrée, appearing in the piano composing, while the violin's sound intertwines with it through the long sounds that affirm and install the tonic (as can be noticed in the middleground reduction in Example 3, system 2).

The finale of the Exposition (bars 59-76) brings a prolongation of step III in G, achieved by using the harmonics relation I-V, which is a passage that prepares the apparition of the developing section.



Fig. 5. *Sonata for piano and violin K.304, First Part (ms. 59-76)*

As to the Development, Schenker said that „It is not possible to issue general assertions about the structure of Development” (Forte and Gilbert 1982, 278). Sometimes episodic in its character, improvisational, even fragmentary, the developing section is, indeed, difficult to analyse from the perspective of continuity (he we refer to the Exposition’s finale, harmonically, and to the finish point: the step V, in the end of the Development, which prepares the return of theme I from the Reprise).

The middle part of the sonata form starts with theme I exposed in the tonality of the dominant (b), exposed through the piano; it is an intertwining of motifs, processed and taken over from the transitional passage, but also from the introduction, all asserting the dominant’s tonality.

Short in its unfolding, the Development is still concise in expressing all the dramatism in the Exposition.

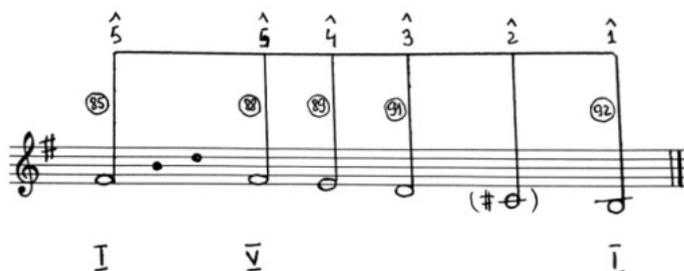


Fig. 6. *Middleground Reduction of Development (ms. 85-92)*

All small modulatory inflections lead to the harmonically preparing phrase (bars 108-112).

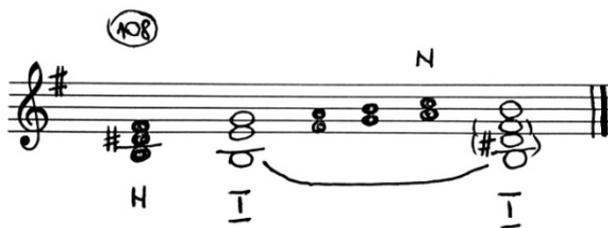


Fig. 7. *Harmonic Reduction of ms. 108-112*

The Reprise, bars 113-209, is run through the tonic's harmonics.

"Far from being a dry and sterile success, the musical analysis from Schenker's perspective is both musical and analytical to the highest degree" (Forte and Gilbert 1982, 2).

2. Acknowledgements

Schenkerian analysis brings a wholly innovating and genial vision on music, as its principles, if applied correctly, open the "inside" of a musical work, making it intelligible and performable to the highest degree.

Following the elaborated reductions, the performer may get an overall view on the sonata parts. Recognising important elements from the graph develops the performer's ability to transfer into playing the ensemble of analysed musical elements, develop his structural hearing, and it facilitates memorising musical works.

In Schenkerian analysis there is a directly proportional relationship between the technical and practical aspects; the analysis elements are precise and clear.

The analysis according to his principles encompasses harmonic and voices in an ensemble concept, and this brings encompassing understanding, grasping of the work.

Schenker's analysis is considered to be one of the most complex musical analyses. However, this is also one of the most rational analyses, at the same time.

This is a form of verbalising the musical text, which leads to an ever-greater closeness to the inflexions of the human voice.

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